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WINTER NEST BOXES FOR RABBITS

Prepared in Fur Resources, Division of Wildlife Research

Winter losses of young rabbits at kindling time can largely be avoided by furnishing proper nesting accommodations. The type of nest box used during the warmer months or in the Southern States must be modified if these freezing losses are to be reduced to the minimum.

If a doe reacts normally to her newborn litter by pulling sufficient wool and feeding her young, and a well insulated nest box is supplied, the young can survive temperatures as low as 15 to 20 degress below zero.

A good type of winter nest box can be made by placing a standard sized nest box inside a larger box so that a space of 3 inches on all sides, except entrance and top, can be packed with straw or other suitable insulating material.

A lid of ordinary box wood covered on the under side with two thicknesses of corrugated cardboard will supply the necessary top insulation. Two or three holes about 1/2 to 3/4 inch in diameter should be made in the end of this lid farthest from the opening to the nest box, for ventilation and to prevent moisture condensation within the nest box.

On the bottom of the inner box one or two layers of corrugated cardboard will keep the newborn litter from coming into contact with the cold boards.

The nest box should then be filled so completely with new clean straw that the doe will have to burrow into it to form her nest cavity.

It is always a good plan to carefully inspect the new litter and remove all dead ones as soon as the doe quiets down after kindling. For nervous does a little tempting feed will often distract her attention while the young are being examined. If the litter is snug and warm and well provided with fur, it should not be culled or otherwise disturbed further that day. Daily inspections for the first three or four days are desirable to take out any that die and be

sure that the litter is dry and comfortable. If enough moisture has accumulated to cause the cardboard to become damp, it should be promptly removed or be replaced with another if it continues exceedingly cold.

A more simple, though probably not quite as warm, nest box can be made by completely lining the standard nest box with one or two layers of corrugated cardboard and then filling full with good straw. The degree of coldness, space available, and building supplies on hand should govern the type of winter nest box to use.